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# A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE IN TENNESSEE

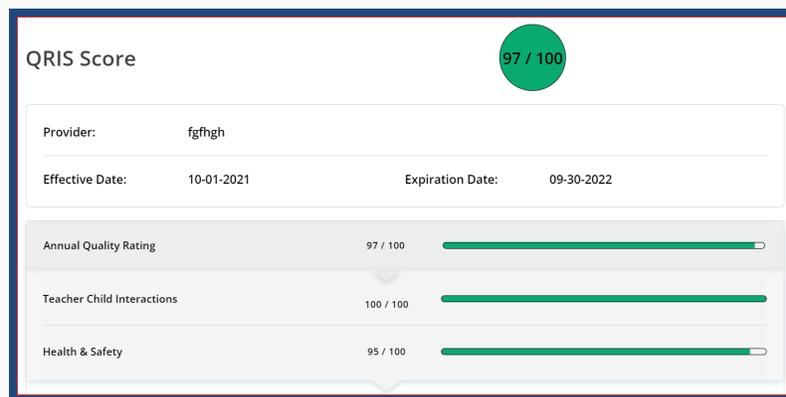
Understanding the TDHS Quality  
Rating & Improvement System

## Dear Parents,

The quality of child care has a direct impact on your child's ability to learn, to build healthy relationships, and otherwise to become the best they can be. The critical decision of where to place your child, however, is often difficult and confusing. The quality of child care, and a positive future for your child, depends on having the tools necessary for making informed choices for your family.

The Department of Human Services is helping you with this very important decision through the Child Care **Score Card** system. The **Score Card** not only gives you the vital information you need to understand how to look for quality child care but also allows you to compare the many different child care programs available in Tennessee.

**Quality Child Care** is also dependent, though, on the continuing efforts of child care providers to provide ever-increasing levels of quality. Thus, to encourage these efforts, the Department has also implemented the Quality Rating and Improvement System.



## The Quality Rating and Improvement System

The QRIS system directly relates the quality of child care provided to the corresponding center, home, or facility. Understanding how the score relates to quality will help you choose which facility **best fits the needs** of your child and your family.

QRIS is designed to score two different areas of quality on a quarterly basis for a total of four (4) visits. The total score possible for each visit is 100. Upon completion of the fourth visit the four scores are averaged to determine the overall score for the child care agency. This score is displayed at the agency or home.

These two broad quality components are:

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**  
and  
**TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS**

## The QRIS Process

The *Department of Human Services* evaluates agencies for the criteria the experts recognize as being critical to ensuring that these needs are met. This criteria includes staff education and experience, the record of the program's compliance with state licensing rules, the educator to child ratios and group sizes, professional business practices, and opportunities for parental involvement.

In addition, four onsite observations are made by a highly trained Licensing Consultant who visits each child care program to evaluate the indoor and outdoor spaces, activities, materials, and the interactions between the children and their educators. During these observations, the Licensing Consultant stays to the back or side of the room and out of the educator's way. Licensing Consultants have been trained not to interfere with the educators or your children, so they don't talk a lot while they are observing the facility.



To make sure every Licensing Consultant looks for the same things at the center or home, the Licensing Consultant is specially trained to use the **Monitoring and Observation Tool** for this onsite observation. This system has been developed to ensure that the child care facility maintains a high-quality level for the children in their care.

You can learn more about child care, and receive assistance in locating child care, by contacting your local Child Care Resource and Referral Service. Visit [tnccrr.org](http://tnccrr.org) for local resources and contact information.

## Child Care Checklist: What to Look For

Take this checklist with you when you go and be sure to ask questions!

### Before You Visit:

- Visit [this link by clicking](#) or scanning the QR code to the right.
- Find child care agencies, by zip code, that are licensed by the Department of Human Services.
- Notice each agency's current QRIS rating.
- Do you see any violations that concern you?



### During The Visit:

- Do you see any safety hazards that concern you?
- Is the staff trained in First Aid and CPR?
- What are the safe sleep policies?
- Are the children supervised at all times?
- What is the staff/child ratio or how many children is each person responsible for?
- Is the playground equipment the right size for children?
- Do the children seem happy and involved?
- Is the staff warm and responsive to the children?
- Are there enough materials and toys for the children in each classroom?
- What types of discipline methods are used?
- Are parents encouraged to drop in at any time?
- Is there a parent bulletin board or other way to communicate with parents regularly?
- Ask for a Parent Handbook.

### After The Visit:

- Think about what you saw during each visit.
- Make the decision that is best for you and your family.
- Stay Involved.